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ABSTRACT

Intended to stimulate and foster better communication, cooperation, and understanding between the National Institute of Education (NIE) and Research Coordinating Units (RCU) personnel, this report documents the compatibility between NIE's objectives and the current activities of the RCU's. In both general and specific terms, the activities of NIE are related to the complementary efforts of the RCU's. The major strengths of the RCU's lie in their inter-agency cooperation and positive administrative relations with local education agencies (LEA's) and national centers. One of the major achievements of the RCU program is the focusing of attention upon research in the field of vocational education. The following RCU functions among others are observed: (1) stimulating, facilitating, and coordinating innovative research and developmental efforts of individuals and groups, (2) producing and evaluating prototype innovative curriculums, (3) administering research-related grants and contracts with agencies and institutions, and (4) disseminating the results of research-related activities to facilitate further research and development, improve the rationality of educational decision-making, and speed the application of new knowledge and the adoption of worthy innovation practice.
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**THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF
RESEARCH COORDINATING UNITS IN THE
RESEARCH - TO - PRACTICE CONTINUUM**

by

Jake Huber



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RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE CONTINUUM

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FOREWORD

This paper was conceived and developed in response to a presentation made by Thomas Israel and David Hampson at the National RCU Personnel Conference held in Atlanta, Georgia on March 19-22, 1973. The remarks made by these two gentlemen from the National Institute of Education (NIE) in their presentation provided two immediate results. First, the participants were advised of the intents and processes of the emerging NIE. Second, the participants were able to identify areas of mutual interest. There exists a compatibility between NIE's objectives and the current activities of the various Research Coordinating Units (RCUs). The recognition of this compatibility brought about the need for a position paper to be written which would assist NIE personnel in recognizing how the national system of RCUs could help them in their efforts.

It should be borne in mind that the RCUs owe their very existence to the U. S. Office of Education, Bureau of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education. Our relationship has been both long and fruitful, and we will continue to maintain it as such. It is intended that this paper will stimulate and foster better communication, cooperation, and understanding between NIE personnel and RCU personnel.

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BACKGROUND

The call for establishment of Research Coordinating Units for vocational education represented an attempt to meet concerns voiced in Congressional hearings on P.L. 88-210. These concerns indicated that research in vocational education was intermittent, uncoordinated, and primarily directed toward the administration and operation of programs. It should be noted that until this time most research in vocational education had been done by students as part of their degree programs. Consequently, the Vocational Education Act of 1963 (P.L. 88-210) carried special provisions to meet the need for developing a conscientious and systematic thrust to research in vocational-technical education.

For the first time in the fifty year history of Federal involvement in this area of education, specific recognition was given an aspect of program development and implementation which previously had received only token acknowledgement. Never before had vocational education acts spelled out so clearly the need for coordination of efforts on the part of vocational educators everywhere; never before had there been such a strong focus on the needs of local and state agencies for involvement in coordinated research and development efforts.
Goldhammer, et. al., 1969

Research Coordinating Units (RCUs) were created to stimulate, encourage, and coordinate research activities among state departments of education, universities, local school districts, and others with an interest in vocational and technical education. Operated and funded with monies made available through research appropriations for vocational education, these units undertook the following activities.

1. Review vocational programs within the states.
2. Disseminate research information.

3. Identify competent research resources within the state.
4. Formulate research priorities.
5. Review research proposals and make recommendations for funding.
6. Provide technical consultative service to those conducting research, management, and coordination of vocational R&D efforts.

The rationale for the Research Coordinating program recognized that many state departments of education were not adequately staffed to assure the management and coordination of desirable research and training programs under the 1963 Act. It was suggested that an appropriate first step be the establishment of occupational research and development units.

Some RCUs were established on university campuses where sophisticated research scholarship and training of vocational education researchers could be accomplished. Other RCUs were located in state departments of education where they could relate to the users, coordinate the development activities, and disseminate research information most appropriately.

Functionally, several RCUs have developed highly regarded research capabilities while others have developed sophisticated research dissemination operations. The remaining RCUs operate at various levels between these functions depending on their perception of the needs within their own state.

These differences make generalization about RCUs difficult for no two are exactly alike. However, in practice, the RCUs, whether located in universities or state departments of education, have evolved as a group into a unified national system of research information dissemination and a valuable technical consultant resource for their users.

RESEARCH

No discussion of RCUs would be complete without an attempt to delineate a generalized philosophy of research. While definitions of research are always dangerous to state, it is regarded as necessary in this case. This is primarily because the RCUs operate within a narrow spectrum of the total research to practice continuum.

In the classical sense, research is often defined as the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowledge, no immediate usage of the knowledge being intended. This may also be called "pure research." The classical disciplines would argue that education is not a discipline; it is a practicing field drawing knowledge from the various recognized disciplines. Therefore, educational research is by definition the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of application of practice. Analyses of research and development in any field draw upon a varied body of knowledge. Research and development for vocational education is no exception. For analyses of this kind to be acceptable, education (and vocational education) cannot be regarded as a discipline. Quite the contrary, it must be a podium for the expression and interaction of diverse social, technical, and political forces which can allow for investigation, study, and improvement. Consequently, the conceptualizations of vocational education research and development are actually linked to the goals and activities that vocational education is called upon to perform by society. Therefore, research in vocational education reacts to society's call and is applied research (action research, development, etc.) in the general sense.

The role of the RCUs in this "paradigm of semantics adnauseum" is to provide their best coordinating services by locating and bringing together all the separate specialities that exist in educational research. The RCUs must then attempt to package the specialty concepts, characteristics, and materials and establish flow-through mechanisms to direct this "new knowledge" to potential users. As a group, the RCUs have not attempted to become solely research-generation organizations. This is as it should be for there are currently in existence some very capable organizations with more than adequate facilities, staff, and other resources to do the "more basic" research. As a system of administrative agencies, the RCUs are much more capable of organizing and planning on the local or state level and testing the results of "more basic" research in their own settings. They have demonstrated both the capability and the experience of monitoring research and exemplary projects, and they, as a group, have demonstrated their ability to disseminate research on vocational, technical, and career education.

The RCUs possess some unique features which have implications for educational change. They are in close proximity to much of the local operational level of education. Their actions relate to the total decision-making framework within an individual state. The sometimes individual interests of state managers, local schools, and universities can be transcended by an overall perspective on the part of RCUs.

Both educational research and dissemination can benefit from the peculiar vantage point of RCUs.

Educational research starts with problem identification which is dependent upon accurate context assessment through observations and other means. The normal close contacts between RCUs and other educational agencies within a state provides much valuable insight to problems in education. This perspective, plus staff expertise, could be utilized further to the identification of researchable problems in education.

Educational change depends upon the applications of solutions to problems. Frequently, those who are confronted by the problems have little direct access to solutions. RCUs play a vital role in the acquisition, selection, and channeling of solutions within the statewide educational system.

DISSEMINATION

A major intent of the monies allocated under Part "C" of the Vocational Education Act has been the dissemination of research and development information to stimulate change. These funds have been significantly effective both locally and nationally.

The individual RCUs comprising the National Association of RCU Personnel have served to further increase the impact of these funds through their individual and collective efforts.

Project Baseline reports that "all of the research coordinating units provide information dissemination services in response to specific requests or in the form of mailings of reports and documents. Most units publish periodically a newsletter containing reviews of recent research and development projects and other information related to change and innovation. In addition, many units publish bibliographies and compile abstracts of research in specific areas of interest. Although data on the total number of users benefiting from this dissemination effort is lacking, it is safe to assume that it is a large percentage indeed of the educators across the nation. ...Although hard data on the actual impact of these dissemination systems to educators across the nation defies collection, to say nothing of measurement, there can be little doubt that the impact is there. Perhaps one of the best examples of this impact is Career Education. The present status of this concept, in terms of interest, discussion, program implementation, and program modification, is due to basic research performed with vocational education money. One of the major conduits through which information about this research flows has been the dissemination network established through the effort of research coordinating units across the nation."
(Lee, 1973)

RCUs have been given responsibility for coordinating the dissemination of research findings. They have acted as a depository for state research findings and as a request center for information on national projects. This information has originated from different sources within the state and from relevant projects outside the state. By actively serving as a linkage

system between LEA personnel and technical systems, RCUs continually attempt to provide up-to-date information critical to innovation.

Dissemination can have passive as well as active forms. It may be important to have repositories of information that can be tapped, as well as to have agencies, programs, or activities designed to carry diverse messages derived from research and development activities to a variety of educators.

The more active forms of RCU dissemination functions include selective dissemination of information systems, information-packaging (or analysis and synthesis) systems, newsletters, publishing, or simulation activities. Yet another form of dissemination is demonstration, the rationale for which is the development of a critical mass of innovations within a given location. Assuming that the innovations have applications outside of their immediate setting, the demonstration center may then become a showplace for other schools to view. Such demonstration centers are frequently "advertised," sponsored, and assisted in their operations by the RCU in a given state.

SUMMARY

The major strengths of RCUs center around inter-agency cooperation and positive administrative relations that have been carefully and systematically built up over the last six years. Both the relations between RCUs and LEAs and the relations between RCUs and national centers are given high priorities.

Goldhammer (et al., 1969) indicates that one:

major achievement of the RCU program is the focusing of attention upon research in the field of occupational education. Comments indicate a fairly strong feeling among at least the occupational education personnel responding in our study that occupational education suffered from an image which placed it in an unfavorable position relative to other areas of education. The RCU program, by stimulating and focusing attention upon occupational education research and development, has undoubtedly influenced the image of occupational education. There is more information and more attention focused upon occupational education today than has previously been true.

Drawing upon the work of Guba and Clark¹, Hull (et al., 1969) has identified RCU functions necessary to the systematic improvement of vocational education. The suggested RCU functions listed below are very much in evidence today.

1. Conducting operational and applied research.
2. Developing new and updating existing curriculums and instructional materials.
3. Evaluating the effectiveness of occupational education programs including: (a) the extent to which certain pilot experimental programs are attaining their goals; (b) the cost/effectiveness of alternative ways of providing occupational instruction; and (c) the total impact of the occupational education program in relation to societal needs and goals.

¹Egon Guba and David Clark, "An Examination of Potential Change Roles in Education." Paper presented at the N.E.A. Conference on Innovation in Planning School Curricula, Airlehouse, Virginia, October 2-4, 1965.

4. Stimulating, facilitating, and coordinating the innovative research and development efforts of individuals and groups.
5. Inventing, engineering, producing, and evaluating prototype innovative curriculums and instructional materials.
6. Administering research-related grants and contracts with agencies and institutions.
7. Disseminating the results of research-related activities to: (a) facilitate further research and development; (b) improve the rationality of educational decision-making; and (c) speed the application of new knowledge and the adoption of worthy innovative practices.
8. Coordinating and conducting training activities designed to increase the number and improve the competence of producers and consumers of occupational education research-related activities.

The reader will note that the conduct of basic research is not included above. This function is best left to those agencies financially and physically capable of performing such work.

State departments of education, vocational educators, teachers, students, and LEA administrators require applied research results now. They can ill afford research which does not relate to existing or anticipated needs. The RCUs have been providing for these needs while at the same time they disseminate the results of applied research and the results of basic research. In this manner, they supply a needed service in the basic research to practice continuum.

IMPLICATIONS

It is noted that the N.I.E. is considering and preparing a substantial thrust affecting the fitting of students of all ages for profitable employment.²

This charge is noted to be compatible with that of Research Coordinating Units funded under the Vocational Act of 1963 (inclusive of P.L. 90-576 and P.L. 92-318). Further, RCUs have amassed a working expertise involving research, development, diffusion, and evaluation. In particular, advances have been pioneered through RCUs in dealing directly with local settings encompassing Career Education/Career Development to date.

The thrust of P.L. 90-576 is said to concern itself, as a social ameliorative act, to deal directly with the education of unemployed youth, adults, and disenfranchised populations per se. The rapid expansion of regular vocational programs and offerings is noted to be a prime focus of this legislated mandate. Also, State Departments of Education have convincingly endeavored to mobilize State Advisory Councils and other advisory groups to implement the thrust of this effort.

It would seem that the linkages prepared for involvement by the RCUs ideally and practically establish the RCUs as outstanding potential partners with the N.I.E.

Finally, it is reiterated that the N.I.E. should avoid the categorical fragmented communication which occurred under E.S.E.A.: Titles III, IV, and V during the past five years. It

²N.I.E., Career Development Task Force, Forward Plan for Career Education Research and Development, Washington, D. C., April 1973.

is anticipated that relationships between the N.I.E. and RCUs can offer promise of the following:

General

<u>N.I.E. Activity</u>	<u>RCUs Complement</u>
1. Research, Development, Dissemination, and Evaluation Support System	1.1 Research, Development, Dissemination, and Evaluation Delivery and Implementation System
2. Model Determination and Control	2.1 Substantiation of Validity and Control and Participation in Model Development and Control
3. Information Flow	3.1 Information Utilization and Generation
4. National Accumulation of: a. knowledge b. practical solutions c. clarification of goals and issues	4.1 Statewide and Local interface at Institutional and Classroom Level of: a. knowledge b. practical solutions c. goal progress and issue resolution
5. Data Based System Development	5.1 Data Based Planning, Pilotings, and Implementation

Specific

<u>N.I.E. Activity</u>	<u>RCUs Complement</u>
1. School Based Model	1.1 Alternative Delivery Vehicles to Meet Local Needs
2. Employer Based Model	2.1 Regional Statistical Bases
3. Home Based Model	3.1 Inter-Agency Services Coordination
4. Rural Residential Model	4.1 Specialized Settings/ Service Integration

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 5. Rural Education | 5.1 Specialized Settings and Equal Opportunities |
| 6. Special Needs | 6.1 Specialized Settings, Equal Opportunities, Statewide Legislation |
| 7. Monitoring of Evaluation Efforts | 7.1 Evaluation Reporting and Conduct |

Finally, it is noted that coordination of multi-discipline University based research on statewide-inter-state bases, as well as coordination of statewide processing of proposals and priorities emanating therefrom, is the direct responsibility of RCUs within states for Vocational/Occupational Education and where related, Career Development and Career Education. The effect of inter-state coordination could be facilitated, stimulated, and cooperatively related by the N.I.E. The diverse research, development, diffusion, and evaluation units which the Research Coordinating Units represent on a continual and controlled basis present exciting opportunity to compare change agencies and their affects upon American Education in this decade.

Initial linkages should be further explored by N.I.E. with the RCU National Conference Committee and representatives of the Division of Vocational and Technical Education working in unison. A timely and needed Status report of RCUs in the States and Territories would be a particularly appropriate basis upon which to explore further inter-relationships between N.I.E. and RCUs.

In closing, it should be well noted that Career Education and/or Career Development as philosophical concepts and processes require adoption and implementation where the Action Is At, in our free society. RCUs have been operating there with substantial vigor these past six years. In this spirit, we welcome our

new Educational partner, the N.I.E., and extend our hands to assist it in the enormous and vital task the Congress has assigned to it.

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